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Research article

To teach or to tell? Consequences of receiving help from experts and peers

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Abstract

Previous research has stressed the positive effects of receiving autonomy-oriented help over dependency-oriented help but has overlooked a potential downside in terms of recipients' evaluations of the helper. Participants in the current experiment (n = 77) requested help while working on difficult puzzles and received either autonomy- or dependency-oriented help from either an expert or a peer. In line with previous findings, receiving autonomy-oriented help led to more self-competence and positive feelings than dependency-oriented help. However, in support of our prediction, participants also felt angrier, had less respect for and less trust in the peer who provided autonomy-oriented help than the peer who provided dependency-oriented help. No differences in the evaluation of the expert helper were found. These findings highlight the importance of considering both the helpers' characteristics and the type of help provided when investigating the psychological consequences of receiving help. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Helping interactions are an important part of our daily lives: we receive advice, support and learn new information from others on a daily basis. Yet, despite the widespread prevalence of helping interactions and the vast amount of research on helping (e.g. Batson, Chang, Orr, & Rowland, 2002; Halabi & Nadler, 2010; Hardy & van Vugt, 2006; Hofmann, Lei, & Grant, 2009; Hopkins, Reicher, Harrison, Cassidy, Bull, & Levine, 2007; Levine & Thompson, 2004; Stürmer, Snyder, Kropp, & Siem, 2006; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010), relatively little is known about how various types of help affect the recipient's evaluation of the helper. The aim of the current paper is to provide a better understanding of both the intended and unintended consequences of receiving different types of help, from helpers of different status. We will show that, contrary to the popular belief that encourages us to *teach a man how to fish is to feed him for a lifetime*, providing autonomy-oriented help might in some cases be detrimental to helping relationships. Specifically, the results presented in this paper will show that, despite the potential benefits that autonomy-oriented help might have for the recipient (e.g. it is more empowering), the recipient's evaluation of the helper can be impaired if help is provided by a peer.

AUTONOMY- VERSUS DEPENDENCY-ORIENTED HELP

Within the helping literature an important distinction is made between autonomy- and dependency-oriented help (Nadler, 1997). Autonomy-oriented help provides one with

the appropriate tools and knowledge to independently solve problems. Dependency-oriented help provides the recipients with the full solution to the problem at hand, but it will not teach them how to solve similar future problems on their own (Jackson & Esses, 2000; Nadler, 1997, 2002). Although dependency-oriented help is less self-supporting than autonomy-oriented help, it tends to have high short-term instrumentality, as the recipients manage to solve the problem at hand immediately (van Leeuwen, Täuber, & Sassenberg, 2010).

To date, research on autonomy- or dependency-oriented help has either focused on the conditions under which people seek these two types of help (Nadler, 1997, 2002; van Leeuwen *et al.*, 2010), or on the different motives for providing help (Jackson & Esses, 2000; Nadler, 2002; Nadler & Halabi, 2006; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2010). Moreover, studies that did investigate reactions to receiving autonomy-oriented help did not include a comparison with dependency-oriented help (Eden & Aviram, 1993; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Although previous studies did not directly compare the effects of *receiving* these two types of help, research on help *seeking* points toward a preference for autonomy- over dependency-oriented help on the recipient's side. People prefer to seek more autonomy- over dependency-oriented help, presumably because of its empowering and self-supporting characteristics (Nadler, 1997, 2002), and people more often seek the former type of help when they want to maintain a positive group impression (van Leeuwen *et al.*, 2010). These studies suggest that people avoid seeking dependency-oriented help because of its potential threat.

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Related literature on help *giving* indicates that individuals tend to provide more dependency- than autonomy-oriented help to maintain status inequality (Nadler, 2002), to maintain economic and power inequality (Jackson & Esses, 2000), and to demonstrate the helper's knowledge and enhance the helper's reputation (van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2010). These authors argue that dependency-oriented help serves to fulfil these motives because it emphasizes the recipients' inferiority and dependence on the helper and does not allow recipients to improve their status or to learn new skills. Other studies have measured the direct impact of receiving an autonomous type of help. For instance Eden and Aviram (1993) found that being trained in job searching skills increased self-efficacy and possibilities of becoming re-employed. Weinstein and Ryan (2010) found that participants experienced greater need satisfaction and felt closer to helpers who provided autonomous help than they did to the ones who provided a controlled help.

Although the previously mentioned studies did not directly compare the effects of receiving autonomy- or dependency-oriented help, they show that autonomy-oriented help has clear self-supporting benefits for the recipient. However, all these studies overlooked an important factor: they did not measure how the recipients evaluated the autonomy- or dependency-oriented help provider. As we further explain, the helper's status is an important factor that can influence the recipient's evaluation of the provider of autonomy- or dependency-oriented help.

EXPERT VERSUS PEER HELPER

Existing literature distinguishes between experts and peers as providers of help (e.g. Hofmann *et al.*, 2009; Nadler, Ellis, & Bar, 2003; Newman & Goldin, 1990; Morrison, 1993). In general, experts are an important source of help. Research in this domain shows that college students more often turn to their professors for explanations rather than to other students (Karabenick, 2003; Newman & Goldin, 1990), and at work people tend to seek more technical information and other forms of help either from colleagues who are perceived as having more expertise or from their supervisors (Hofmann *et al.*, 2009; Nadler, Ellis, & Bar, 2003; Morrison, 1993). However, at other times, people seek assistance from their peers. Students often seek straightforward answers from their peers in web-based help networks such as Internet blogs (Bull & McCalla, 2002; Bull, Greer, McCalla, & Kettel, 2001) and they also copy complete answers for their coursework from their peers (Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, & Armstead, 1996).

Summarizing the above, current evidence seems to suggest that with respect to the source of help, evidence is mixed, suggesting that both experts and peers can be viewed as valuable providers of help. With respect to the type of help, a preference should exist for autonomy- over dependency-oriented help, because of the self-supporting elements characteristic to the former help type. However, since previous research has largely overlooked evaluations of the helper as being an important outcome of receiving help, relatively little is known about how receiving either autonomy- or

dependency-oriented help, or help from either experts or peers, affects these evaluations. Moreover, these lines of research have never been empirically integrated to investigate the joint effects of help type and the source of help on recipients' psychological responses and their evaluations of the helper. This is the aim of the current research.

RECEIVING AUTONOMY- OR DEPENDENCY-ORIENTED HELP FROM PEERS OR EXPERTS

In line with the previous literature (e.g. Jackson & Esses, 2000; Nadler, 1997, 2002) we predict that, overall, recipients of autonomy-oriented help will feel more competent, empowered, respected and positive about seeking help than recipients of dependency-oriented help (*Hypothesis 1*). However, with respect to the evaluations of the *provider* of dependency- or autonomy-oriented help, the story is different. In this case, the evaluation of the helper is contingent on whether the helper is an expert, or the recipient's peer, for reasons outlined below.

Experts are viewed as tutors, people whose superior expertise is beyond question, and who can be expected to educate and empower inexperienced learners (Hofmann *et al.*, 2009; Nadler *et al.*, 2003; Trouilloud, Sarrazin, Bressoux, & Bois, 2006). In line with this, the act of providing autonomy-oriented help is associated with a status differential, and therefore experts providing this kind of help act in line with people's expectations, as they are assumed to have the knowledge and expertise required to teach and empower students (Karabenick, 2003; Nadler *et al.*, 2003), whereas peers are not. Peers who provide autonomy-oriented help are engaging in status incongruent behaviour, which is not in line with their position in the social hierarchy. Because people who behave in a manner incongruent with their status position are socially punished (Anderson, Ames, & Gosling, 2008), the evaluations of such peer helpers can be negatively affected. And therein lies the duality of receiving autonomy-oriented help from peers: The help itself can be appreciated because it is more self-supporting than dependency-oriented help, but its incongruence with the peer helper's status could decrease recipient's evaluations of the helper. In contrast, dependency-oriented help that is provided by a peer is more in line with the helper's status and can be perceived as useful and instrumental. As studies showed, students tend to copy answers to problems (i.e. seek dependency-oriented help) from their classmates to obtain higher grades or because of time pressure (Newstead *et al.*, 1996), and they often seek direct answers from peers in web-based help networks to get a quick solution to their problem (Bull & McCalla, 2002; Bull *et al.*, 2001). We therefore reasoned that peers who provide autonomy-oriented help would receive less trust and respect from the helpees than peers who provide dependency-oriented help.

In contrast to peers, experts who provide autonomy-oriented help exhibit behaviour congruent with their status. Experts are expected to provide autonomy-oriented help in order to allow low status individuals to acquire the critical skills to reach a higher status (Nadler, 2002). As Nadler (2002) argued, low-status individuals feel threatened when high status individuals continuously provide them with dependency-oriented help because this help can be used as a mean to

maintain social inequality. However, we propose that the evaluation of experts is less strongly affected by the type of help they provide for two reasons. First, experts' high status position provides them with greater latitude in behaviour (Magee and Galinsky, 2008). That is, high status individuals are generally conferred with respect and trust, regardless of their behaviour. Second, the occasional provision of dependency-oriented help is not necessarily *incongruent* with an expert's status. When busy or under time pressure, for example, experts may give dependency-oriented help simply because it is often the fastest or least demanding type of response. Providing dependency-oriented help will therefore neither directly undermine their high status position nor automatically result in more negative evaluations.

Based on the previous reasoning, we predicted that participants would feel less trust in, have less respect for, and feel angrier when confronted with a peer who provides them with autonomy-oriented help compared to a peer who provides them with dependency-oriented help. No differences in trust, respect nor anger were expected between participants receiving dependency-oriented help from an expert and those receiving autonomy-oriented help from an expert (*Hypothesis 2*).

METHOD

Participants and Design

The study was conducted at the VU University Amsterdam, with 77 undergraduate students (47 women, 30 men, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.45$, $SD = 3.63$). Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (help type: autonomy- or dependency-oriented help) \times 2 (helper: expert or peer) between participants experimental design.

Procedure

Participants arrived at the laboratory and were seated in separate cubicles with a computer that provided them with instructions, a help-receiving task and a questionnaire. The help-receiving task was used to study the psychological responses to receiving either autonomy- or dependency-oriented help from a helper who was described as either an expert or a peer. Help was given in the form of help cards which participants could use to solve the puzzles. Specifically, while solving difficult puzzles, participants could request a help card and subsequently received a card containing either autonomy- or dependency-oriented help, from either an expert or a peer.

The puzzles of the help-receiving task consisted of 10 logical-mathematical puzzles that were chosen from a total of 28 puzzles, which were pre-tested with 18 individuals who rated their difficulty (1 = very easy to 5 = very difficult). To promote help seeking, 10 puzzles that were rated as difficult (four) to very difficult (five) in the pre-test were chosen. An example of a puzzle is: 'Solve the following equation: $V + L \times C + X (D - M) = ?$ '.

As puzzles were presented, participants had to make a first attempt to solve a puzzle on their own (no help card was available). Upon correctly solving the puzzle, participants would continue with the next puzzle. If their answer was incorrect they could request a help card and then try again. If their second answer was also incorrect, they could ask for a second help card and retry. After four attempts to solve a puzzle (with a maximum of two help cards), participants were automatically redirected to the next question.

The type of help (autonomy- or dependency-oriented help) was manipulated by presenting hints as opposed to answers in the help cards. In the *autonomy-oriented help condition*, the help cards showed a hint that could help them solve the problem, but participants still needed to make an effort to solve it. An example of a first hint of the problem described above is: 'Use Roman numerals and convert them into standard numbers'. In the *dependency-oriented help condition*, the help card showed a complete answer. For the problem mentioned above, the help card was: '5'. In the autonomy-oriented help condition, the second help card provided a second hint, such as ' $V =$ One hand has this amount of fingers, $X =$ It is the double of V , $L =$ If you multiply X by V you will get L , $C =$ It is the double of L , $D =$ If you multiply V by C you will get D , $M =$ It is double of D . Also, if you multiply X by C you will get M '. In the dependency-oriented help condition, the second help card simply provided them with the answer again, for example 'The answer is: 5'.

Participants were informed that the help cards were created by an expert or a peer. In the *expert condition*, participants were told that the help cards were created by Professor Anthon Huisman, who was described as an expert in solving complex logical-mathematical problems. In the *peer condition*, participants were told that the help cards were created by a fellow student, Anthon Huisman. The peer was described as being another student who is not a specific expert in solving complex logical-mathematical problems. Participants in all conditions were assured that the information on the help cards was accurate.

Measures

When the help-receiving task was finished, the reactions of the participants to the helper and type of help received were measured. Participants were presented with questions that began with the phrase: 'To what extent do the following statements apply to you'. Unless otherwise indicated, answers were assessed on seven-point scales (1 = not at all and 7 = very much). Scales were created by averaging the items.

The manipulation of help type was checked by asking participants to what extent they felt they received a *hint* (The help I received while working on the puzzles looks more like a hint than a complete answer) or an *answer* (When I requested a help card while I was working on the puzzles, I felt I received a complete answer). To check the manipulation of helper, participants were asked to indicate whether the help they received came from an 'expert' or from a 'peer'.

Dependency-oriented help is assumed to have more instrumental value than autonomy-oriented help (Nadler, 1997). *Perceived instrumentality* of the received help was measured with three items (e.g. 'The help I received while

working on the puzzles always directly enabled me to answer the puzzle correctly'; $\alpha = .78$). Autonomy-oriented help is assumed to provide more learning elements than dependency-oriented help (Nadler, 1997). *Perceived educational value* of the received help was measured with four items (e.g. 'Whenever I requested a help card while making the puzzles, I usually received an explanation of the best way of looking at the problem'; $\alpha = .88$).

To measure if participants *felt positive about seeking help*, three items were presented [e.g. 'I enjoyed requesting the help cards', 'requesting a help card gave me an unpleasant feeling (reversed coded)' $\alpha = .73$]. *Feeling respected* after receiving help was measured with two items (e.g. 'The help that I received often gave me the feeling that I was respected'; $r = .58$). *Feeling incompetent* after receiving help was assessed with two items (e.g. 'The help that I received often gave me the feeling that I was not capable of solving the problems on my own'; $r = .72$). *Perceived self-competence* after performing the task was measured with two items (e.g. 'I think I am very good at solving the kind of puzzles that I just worked on'; $r = .46$). *Feeling empowered* after performing the task was assessed with three items (e.g. 'While working on the puzzles I felt powerful'; $\alpha = .70$).

To measure *respect for the helper*, three items were presented (e.g. 'I respect the helper'; $\alpha = .74$). *Trust in the helper* was measured with two items (e.g. 'I feel I can really trust the helper'; $r = .64$). *Feelings of anger* were measured with two items (e.g. 'While you were working on the puzzles, to what extent did you feel angry'; $r = .61$). Upon finishing the questionnaire, participants were paid, debriefed and thanked for their participation.

RESULTS

Unless otherwise indicated, the dependent variables were analyzed in separate analyses of variance with help type and helper as independent variables.

Manipulation checks

The manipulation of help type was successful: a significant main effect of help type revealed that participants who received autonomy-oriented help reported more often that the help they received was a *hint* ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.22$) than participants who received dependency-oriented help ($M = 1.39$, $SD = 0.85$), $F(1,73) = 222.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .75$). Participants who received autonomy-oriented help reported less often that the help they received was a *complete answer* ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.73$) than participants who received dependency-oriented help ($M = 6.53$, $SD = 0.95$), $F(1,73) = 92.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .56$).

The check for the manipulation of helper was analyzed in an ordinal logistic generalized linear model analysis with helper, help type and their interaction term as independent variables. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of helper only, $\chi^2(1) = 16.03$, $p > .001$. In the expert condition, 80% of participants answered that they received help from an expert, whereas in peer condition, 69% answered that they received help from a peer. Neither the main effect of help type nor the interaction term were significant.

A significant main effect of help type was found for perceived *instrumentality of the help*, $F(1,73) = 134.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .64$ and for *educational value*, $F(1,73) = 160.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .68$. The analyses revealed that participants who received autonomy-oriented help reported that the help received was less instrumental in solving the problems ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.04$ vs. $M = 6.19$, $SD = 0.96$) and had a higher educational value ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 0.74$ vs. $M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.14$) as compared to participants who received dependency-oriented help. These results show that the manipulations were successful.

Reactions to Help Type

In support of Hypothesis 1, a series of significant main effects of help type were found for *feeling positive about seeking help*, $F(1,73) = 5.57$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$, for *feeling respected*, $F(1,73) = 28.10$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .27$, for *feeling incompetent*, $F(1,73) = 8.67$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .10$, for *feeling self-competent*, $F(1,73) = 4.29$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .055$ and for *feeling empowered*, $F(1,73) = 4.39$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$. All significant main effects followed the same pattern: participants who received autonomy-oriented help reported feeling more positive about seeking help ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.88$ vs. $M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.12$), more respected ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.71$ vs. $M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.43$) and less incompetent ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.45$ vs. $M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.78$) after receiving the help, as well as more self-competent ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.13$ vs. $M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.34$) and more empowered ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.06$ vs. $M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.04$) after performing the task than participants who received dependency-oriented help. No other effects were found (see Table 1).

Reactions to the helper

Significant interaction effects were found for *respect for the helper* $F(1,73) = 4.61$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$, for *trust in the helper* $F(1,73) = 4.30$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$ and for *feelings of anger* $F(1,73) = 4.98$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Simple effects analyses revealed that all three interactions followed the same pattern: If help was provided by a peer, participants reported more respect for the helper ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.13$ vs. $M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.24$, $F(1,73) = 4.67$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$), trusted the helper more ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.39$ vs. $M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.58$, $F(1,73) = 4.60$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$) and felt less angry ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.35$ vs. $M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.53$, $F(1,73) = 8.31$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .10$) if the help was dependency-oriented rather than autonomy-oriented. No significant differences were observed when the autonomy- or dependency-oriented help was provided by an expert for respect, for trust and for feelings of anger (all F 's $< .76$, all p 's $> .05$).

In conclusion, these results support Hypothesis 2 by showing that participants felt more angry, had less respect for and less trust in the peer who provided autonomy-oriented help than in the peer who provided dependency-oriented help. As expected, variations in the type of help provided by an expert did not affect participants' feelings of anger, trust and respect for the expert.

Table 1. Means (and standard deviations) as a function of help type and helper

	Peer		Expert	
	Autonomy-oriented help, <i>M</i> (SD)	Dependency-oriented help, <i>M</i> (SD)	Autonomy-oriented help, <i>M</i> (SD)	Dependency-oriented help, <i>M</i> (SD)
Manipulation checks				
Receiving a hint	5.00 (1.29)	1.53 (0.96)	5.05(1.19)	1.26 (0.73)
Receiving a complete answer	3.26 (1.73)	6.37 (1.26)	3.60 (1.76)	6.68 (0.48)
Instrumentality of help	3.28 (0.85)	6.23 (1.08)	3.83 (1.15)	6.16 (0.86)
Educational value of help	4.47 (0.73)	2.03 (1.37)	4.92 (0.070)	1.83 (0.89)
Reactions to help type				
Feeling positive about seeking help	4.32 (1.04)	3.88 (1.09)	4.23 (0.73)	3.58 (1.16)
Feeling respected	4.16 (0.88)	3.08 (1.47)	4.25 (0.52)	2.60 (1.38)
Feeling incompetent	3.42 (1.34)	4.84 (1.76)	3.30 (1.59)	4.05 (1.75)
Perceived self-competence	3.84 (1.29)	3.13 (1.66)	3.50 (0.96)	3.03 (0.99)
Feeling empowered	3.67 (1.16)	3.10 (1.10)	3.60 (0.99)	3.14 (1.01)
Reactions to the helper				
Respect for the helper	3.86 (1.24) _a	4.65 (1.13) _b	4.38 (0.80) _x	4.07 (1.27) _x
Trust in the helper	4.53 (1.58) _a	5.53 (1.39) _b	5.20 (0.98) _x	4.84 (1.71) _x
Feelings of anger	5.13 (1.53) _a	3.74 (1.35) _b	3.85(1.54) _x	3.97 (1.53) _x

Note: Means with different subscripts per row differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$) in tests for the simple main effect of help type within each level of helper: peer (a,b) or expert (x,y).

DISCUSSION

The present study is the first to successfully demonstrate that people's reactions to receiving help are determined by the interaction of both the type of help provided (autonomy- or dependency-oriented help) and the source of the help (expert or peer). We predicted and found that the recipients of autonomy-oriented help felt more competent, respected, and were more positive about seeking help, than recipients of dependency-oriented help. These results are in line with earlier research, which demonstrated that autonomy-oriented help is perceived as more self-supporting than dependency-oriented help (Jackson & Esses, 2000; Nadler, 1997, 2002).

Whereas at first glance it may seem that autonomy-oriented help should be vastly preferable over dependency-oriented help, our results show that the source of help is an important moderator of the recipients' reaction to the helper. Specifically, when participants received help from another student, autonomy-oriented help lead to feelings of anger, mistrust and disrespect for the helper. Interestingly, the recipients of autonomy-oriented help from a fellow student felt more positive and competent by the help they received, yet simultaneously evaluated the person who provided them with this type of help more negatively. As expected, no difference was found between the evaluations of *experts* providing autonomy- or dependency-oriented help. High status individuals are generally granted more freedom to act according to their own will (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Moreover, the provision of dependency-oriented help is not as incongruent to the expert's status position as autonomy-oriented help is to a peer's status position. As a consequence, experts continue to be respected and trusted, regardless of the type of help they provide.

Our prediction that recipients of help will respond more positively to expert helpers who provide either autonomy- or dependency-oriented help, as well as to peer helpers who provide dependency-oriented help, was based on the notion that these types of behaviour are congruent with the high or low status position of the helper. Indeed we found no

significant statistical difference in response to these three combinations of help and helper, but we did find that peers providing autonomy-oriented help were negatively evaluated. It is possible that recipients have come to *expect* these behaviours from experts and peers. That is, peers may not be expected to provide autonomy-oriented help because this is incongruent with their status position. Thus peers who do provide autonomy-oriented help violate existing expectations, which could reduce trust and respect for the helper. Experts' high status position, on the other hand, confers them with more flexibility in their behaviour, so neither type of help would constitute a serious violation of expectations. Future studies should examine to what extent expectations regarding the type of help experts and peers provide play a role in people's responses to receiving help.

Although high status individuals generally benefit of greater latitude in acceptable behaviour (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), the current study raises the question whether experts who continuously provide dependency-oriented help will be respected in the long run. We believe that this may not be the case. Consider, for example, a professor who always provides a complete and immediate solution to students' problems, rather than teaching them to solve the problems by themselves. In this situation, students may ultimately consider internal causes for this out-of-role behaviour, such as the professor's lack of motivation or expertise, which would lower their respect for the teacher. Future research should examine the long term consequences of receiving dependency-oriented help from experts.

A possible limitation to our study lies in the generalizability of our findings across contexts. The main results confirming Hypothesis 1, that autonomy-oriented help was more positive for the recipient than dependency-oriented help, are applicable to learning contexts; however, in contexts where instrumentality is important the preference for the type of help might differ. For instance, in a crisis situation, in which a prompt solution is needed, dependency-oriented help will be more useful than autonomy-oriented help, because the former has inherent instrumental qualities needed to solve the problem at

hand faster. Similarly, there may be limitations in generalizability of the findings for our second hypothesis, specifically the fact that participants negatively evaluated the peer providing autonomy-oriented help over the one providing dependency-oriented help. It may well be that in contexts in which interpersonal relationships are important, a peer who provides autonomy-oriented help will be evaluated more positively. Initial support for this suggestion is provided by Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner and Ryan (2006), who found that friends feel closer and more satisfied with their relationships when both of them provide an autonomous type of help. In these two studies, autonomous help was operationalized as understanding the other's feelings, listening to the other's ideas and providing choices to the friend. Possibly, peers who provide autonomous support in interpersonal contexts will be more positively evaluated, because exhibiting higher knowledge and self-competence is not as important as in learning contexts. In such contexts, it could become more important to count on a friend, to provide interpersonal nourishment or share emotional experiences (Deci *et al.*, 2006).

To conclude, results from the current paper are important in establishing effective helping relations. Even though sometimes help is given with the best intentions, if helpers provide a type of help that is not according to their role (i.e. peers providing autonomy-oriented help), help recipients can mistrust the helper's intentions, with detrimental effects for future interactions between the two parties. Therefore, to establish more positive helping relations, it is important to consider what type of help is provided, and by whom.

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